

Practice Tips

Donna Manca, MD, CCFP

Ring and string

How to remove a ring using a string



Figure 1



Figure 2

When I was a resident, I learned a nifty technique for removing rings.¹ It was a useful way to avoid cutting them off. It was not helpful, however, when the subject had severe swelling and pain in the finger.

The main advantage with this method is that the ring is not damaged. The fringe benefit is that you can impress your friends and relatives. The main disadvantage is that it is time-consuming.

Indications

It is important to choose your subjects carefully, because this method can cause increased swelling and discomfort. I use it when soap and water has failed and there is minimal swelling and no pain. It should not be done when the finger is swollen and tender, particularly if the ring needs to be removed quickly. I, therefore, advise you to have a ring-cutter handy. If the subject has osteoarthritis enlarging the proximal interphalangeal (PIP) joint, this method is likely to fail.

Description

You need a fair length of string (I prefer waxed dental floss) and something to pull or poke the string under the ring (I have used a toothpick or a fine crochet hook). First you poke the string under the ring. Next, wrap the string around the finger. Wrap firmly so that the string compresses the finger (**Figure 1**). Keep wrapping the string until you have compressed an area about halfway to the PIP joint.

Then pull slowly on the proximal end of the string (the end you poked under the ring) (**Figure 2**). When pulling, direct the force toward the ring so that the string pulls the ring over the compressed finger. The string will unwind as you pull. Repeat winding and pulling until you have inched the ring up the finger and past the PIP joint. Usually, once you have passed the PIP joint, the ring comes off easily.

Discussion

I have used this technique approximately a dozen times. I use it more often on friends and relatives than on patients. I have not yet failed, however, I choose my subjects carefully as described above. In a busy office practice, I find it more efficient to cut rings off than to spend up to half an hour playing with string.

Other methods of reducing the swelling to remove a ring have been described in the literature. They involve using rubber bands, self-adherent compression bandages, or arterial tourniquets.²⁻⁴ ♦

References

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2. Cresap CR. Removal of a hardened steel ring from an extremely swollen finger. *Am J Emerg Med* 1995;13(3):318-20.
3. Mullett ST. Ring removal from the oedematous finger. An alternative method. *J Hand Surg (Br)* 1995;20(4):496.
4. Nancarrow JD. A simple technique for removing stubborn rings prior to hand surgery. *J Hand Surg (Br)* 1993;18(4):544.

Dr Donna Manca practises family medicine in Edmonton.